

Choosing Quality Child Care

The best time to look for child care is long before you need it! Finding the right type of care can take time so start your search early.

Decide on what type of care you want. Do you want a **child care center** or **in-home care**? Do you need evening, overnight and weekend care? Whatever your decision, know this: ***not all child care services in Virginia are required to be licensed.***

Before calling or visiting providers, get answers to questions that can help guide your search. Questions to ask include:

- ◆ What are the licensing requirements in my area?
- ◆ Where can I get information about complaints and licensing violations?
- ◆ Does my family qualify for any child care financial assistance programs?

Visit the places you are considering. Take a tour and ask questions about these key indicators of quality:

- ◆ **Adult to Child Ratio.** A lower number of children is beneficial to your child. For babies a ratio of 1:4 is ideal, which means four babies for one adult. For older children, aim for a ratio of 10 students for one adult.

- ◆ **Caregiver Qualifications.** Ask about the caregivers' training and education. More of either is a good thing.
- ◆ **Turnover.** You don't want a revolving door for caregivers. Find out how long current caregivers have been working at the facility. For an in-home caregiver, ask how long he or she has been a provider, and request a one-year commitment.
- ◆ **Accreditation.** Learn if the childcare provider has been accredited by a national organization. Accredited providers have met voluntary standards for child care that are more stringent than most state licensing requirements. In Virginia it is called the *Star Quality System*.

Trust your instincts when making your decision. Then stay involved. Visit often and show up unannounced. Ask questions and volunteer when you can.

The caregiver you choose is your partner in teaching and nurturing your child. Follow up to make sure your child is getting the care he or she deserves.



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1-800-552-7096 Virginia Child Abuse Hotline (language line available)
800-Children (800-244-5373) Parent Helpline